

Message Text

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O R 261645Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY OSLO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6211
INFO USMISSION USNATO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
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SECDEF WASHDC
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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, NATO, PEPR, PINT, UR, NO
SUBJ: SOVIET SHIP VIOLATIONS OF NORWEGIAN WATERS

REF: STATE 187973
1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE GON PLANS TO BRIEF THE ALLIES ON SOVIET
SHIP INCIDENTS. GON IS STILL UNCLEAR ON SOVIET MOTIVES

FOR THE INCIDENTS AND IS TRYING TO CONTAIN REACTIONS
TO THE INCIDENTS UNTIL ALL THE FACTS ARE IN. EMBASSY RECOMMENDS
SIMILAR POSTURE BY USG. END SUMMARY.

2. AS INSTRUCTED REFTEL, DCM MET WITH MF POLITICAL DIRECTOR
TORBJORN CHRISTIANSEN JULY 26 TH TO DISCUSS RECENT SOVIET
SHIP INCIDENTS. DCM DREW ON PARA 2-4 REFTEL AS A POSSIBLE
HYPOTHESIS TO EXPLAIN THE RECENT SERIES OF SOVIET SHIP
VIOLATIONS. HE NOTED THAT WHATEVER THE REASON FOR THE PATTERN
OF VIOLATIONS, OUR GOVERNMENT FELT IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT
THE ALLIANCE COORDINATE ITS ASSESSMENT OF THESE INCIDENTS
AND THAT THE NORWEGIAN RESPONSE ALSO BE COORDINATED. IN
CONCLUSION HE SAID HE HOPED THE NORWEGIANS WOULD GO THROUGH
WITH THEIR PLAN TO BRIEF THE ALLIES IN BRUSSELS.

3. IN REPLY CHRISTIANSEN STATED THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY
HAD INSTRUCTED THE NORWEGIAN DELEGATION IN BRUSSELS JULY 26 TO
CIRCULATE A NOTE TO THE OTHER MISSIONS THERE AND TO THE SECRETARY
GENERAL CONTAINING THE FOLLOWING THREE POINTS:

A) BETWEEN THE PERIOD JUNE 27 TO JULY 26, THERE HAVE BEEN
14 REPORTED INCIDENTS OF NON-MILITARY FOREIGN VESSELS VIOLATING
NORWEGIAN REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO NORWAY'S TERRITORIAL SEAS.
OF THESE REPORTED INCIDENTS, 10 INVOLVED SOVIET SHIPS, ONE AN
EAST GERMAN SHIP AND ONE EACH SHIPS FROM GREAT BRITAIN,
THE NETHERLANDS AND WEST GERMANY. THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT
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HAS ESTABLISHED THAT IN ITS OPINION IN 4 INSTANCES SOVIET
SHIPS HAVE VIOLATED NORWEGIAN LAW. THE INCIDENTS INVOLVING
THE BRITISH AND DUTCH SHIPS ARE STILL UNDER INVESTIGATION.
(IN RESPONSE TO DCM'S QUESTION, CHRISTIANSEN STATED THAT IN
THE OTHER 6 INCIDENTS INVOLVING SOVIET SHIPS, THE GON HAS
DETERMINED THAT AS FAR AS IT CAN TELL NO VIOLATIONS OCCURRED AND
THE GON WILL TAKE NO FURTHER ACTION.)

B) THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT HAS APPROACHED THE SOVIETS
THROUGH THE SOVIET EMBASSY IN OSLO TO ASK FOR AN EXPLANATION
OF THESE INCIDENTS.

C) IT IS THE CURRENT OPINION OF THE GON THAT THE
SOVIET MOVEMENTS ARE NOT CONNECTED WITH ANY MILITARY ACTIVITY.

4. CHRISTIANSEN STATED THAT THE 4 INCIDENTS WHICH THE GOVERNMENT
IS REFERRING TO ARE THE FOLLOWING: (NOTE: ALL BUT THE
LAST OF THESE INCIDENTS TOOK PLACE EAST OF 24 DEGREES EAST --
THE OPERATIONAL LIMIT FOR NATO NAVAL MANEUVERS WITHIN NORWEGIAN
TERRITORIAL WATERS.)

A) JUNE 27TH -- A SOVIET FREIGHTER AND THREE BOAT CARRIERS

ANCHORED AFTER BEING REFUSED PERMISSION TO DO SO NEAR NORDKYN
PENINSULA (REPORTED OSLO 3245).

B) JULY 12TH -- A SOVIET FREIGHTER ANCHORED AT KINNARODDEN
EAST OF NORTH CAPE ONE QUARTER OF A MILE OFF SHORE AGAIN WITHOUT
PERMISSION (REPORTED OSLO 3392).

C) JULY 20TH -- SOVIET CARGO VESSEL IRTYSJLES STOPPED
WITHOUT PERMISSION IN NORWEGIAN TERRITORIAL WATERS AND WAS
SUBSEQUENTLY ARRESTED (OSLO 3503).

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D) JULY 23RD -- A SOVIET LUMBER VESSEL, ISTRA, STOPPED WITHOUT PERMISSION 1.5 NAUTICAL MILES INSIDE OF NORWEGIAN TERRITORIAL WATERS NEAR SOEROEYA (OSLO 3537).

5. CHRISTIANSEN STATED THAT THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN HIS MEETING JULY 21ST WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD TOLD THE NORWEGIANS THE INCIDENT ON JUNE 27TH HAD OCCURRED BECAUSE OF BAD WEATHER. THE AMBASSADOR PROMISED TO GET BACK TO THE NORWEGIANS WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE OTHER TWO INCIDENTS LATER ON (CHRISTIANSEN WAS NOT CERTAIN WHETHER THE NORWEGIANS HAD YET RAISED THE JULY 23 INCIDENT WITH THE SOVIETS.) MEANWHILE THE NORWEGIAN CABINET, AT ITS REGULAR WEEKLY MEETING JULY 27TH, WILL BE BRIEFED ON THE FACTS OF THE INCIDENTS TO DATE. IT WILL NOT BE ASKED TO TAKE ANY DECISIONS AND GON DOES NOT CONTEMPLATE FURTHER ACTIONS UNTIL THEY RECEIVE THE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PROMISED BY THE SOVIET EMBASSY.

6. CHRISTIANSEN STRESSED THAT IT IS THE GON'S INTENTION TO TRY TO CONTAIN THE REACTION TO THE INCIDENTS UNTIL ALL THE FACTS ARE AVAILABLE AT WHICH TIME THE GON WILL CONSIDER WHAT ADDITIONAL STEPS MAY BE NECESSARY. AS FAR AS PUTTING THE SUBJECT ON THE AGENDA OF THE NAC (PARA 8 REFTTEL), CHRISTIANSEN SAID THIS QUESTION TOO WOULD HAVE TO BE LEFT OPEN UNTIL ALL THE FACTS ARE AVAILABLE.

7. IN A FURTHER DISCUSSION OF THE US HYPOTHESIS FOR THE INCIDENTS, CHRISTIANSEN SERIOUSLY QUESTIONED THE CONNECTION WITH THE EAST GERMAN SHIP NOTING THAT THIS VESSEL HAD BEEN SPOTTED ONLY 100 METERS INSIDE THE NORWEGIAN TERRITORIAL SEA AND HAD IMMEDIATELY MOVED OUT WHEN ASKED TO DO SO BY THE NORWEGIAN AUTHORITIES. HE WAS, THEREFORE, NOT INCLINED TO CONNECT THE INCIDENTS TO STANAVFORLANT'S PRESENCE IN NORTHERN NORWAY (SEE COMMENT BELOW).

8. CHRISTIANSEN NOTED ON A PERSONAL BASIS THAT EVEN IF IT
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WAS SAFE TO CONCLUDE THAT THE SOVIET INCIDENTS WERE NOT CONNECTED WITH ANY MILITARY ACTIVITY, NONETHELESS THE GON WAS FACED WITH THE FACT THAT SEVERAL VERIFIED VIOLATIONS HAD OCCURRED IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AND IN A SMALL AREA. THEREFORE, IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT THE INCIDENTS WERE INTENDED TO CONVEY A

POLITICAL MESSAGE. CHRISTIANSEN'S OWN SPECULATION WAS THAT IF THIS WAS THE SOVIET'S INTENTION, IT "HAS ALREADY BACKFIRED" JUDGING FROM STRONG PUBLIC INDIGNATION OVER THE SOVIET SHIP INCIDENTS. CHRISTIANSEN DID CONFIRM THAT THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR ON JULY 18TH HAD READ AN ORAL PROTEST TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER ABOUT THE RECENT INSPECTION BY NORWEGIAN VESSELS OF SOVIET FISHING VESSELS IN THE SVALBARD FPZ (PARA 4 OSLO 3537). IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT THE POLITICAL MESSAGE OF THESE INCIDENTS WAS RELATED TO THIS HARDENING SOVIET LINE ON THE FPZ, THOUGH IT WAS HARD TO DRAW THAT CONCLUSION AT PRESENT.

9. WE TOLD CHRISTIANSEN THAT WE UNDERSTOOD THE GON HAD RECENTLY REJECTED A SOVIET REQUEST FOR PASSAGE BY RIVER BOATS THROUGH NORWQY'S INLAND WATERWAYS AND WONDERED IF THIS MIGHT BE CONNECTED WITH THE INCIDENTS (MOSCOW 17276). CHRISTIANSEN STATED THAT HE STRONGLY DOUBTED A CONNECTION ACCORDING TO CHRISTIANSEN THESE SOVIETS ASKED FOR PERMISSION FOR BALTIC-BASED RIVER BOATS TO USE INLAND WATERWAYS IN NORTHERN NORWAY. ACCORDING TO NORWEGIAN LAW, IF SUCH SHIPS INTEND TO PASS THROUGH PROHIBITED ZONES (WHICH THE SOVIETS PROPOSED TO DO) THEY NEED ADVANCE PERMISSION FROM THE GON. CHRISTIANSEN SAID THAT PERMISSION HAD BEEN DENIED BY THE GON FOR SECURITY REASONS. (WE UNDERSTAND FROM OTHER MFA SOURCES THAT THE ORIGINAL SOVIET REQUEST WAS MADE IN MARCH. AFTER BEING TURNED DOWN AT THE DIRECTOR GENERAL LEVEL, THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR SUBSEQUENTLY RAISED THE ISSUE AGAIN WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND WAS AGAIN TURNED DOWN.)

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10. COMMENT: JUDGING FROM THE FACTS AVAILABLE TO US NOW, WE ARE INCLINED TO AGREE WITH THE GON THAT THE SOVIET MOTIVES FOR THE INCIDENTS ARE NOT YET CLEAR. THE THESIS ADVANCED BY STATE 187973 RELATING THE INCIDENTS TO STANAVFORLANT'S ACTIVITIES AND THE PRESENCE OF A WEST GERMAN VESSEL IN STANAVFORLANT STRIKES US AT THE EMBASSY AS SOMEWHAT STRAINED. ACCORDING TO WHAT WE CAN LEARN OF STANAVFORLANT'S ACTIVITIES HERE, WHILE THE FORCE WAS IN QUOTE NORTHERN WATERS UNQUOTE FROM JULY 3, IT DID NOT ENTER NORWEGIAN WATERS UNTIL JULY 19. THE STRIKE FORCE THEN PROCEEDED TO TROMSO BY WAY OF LOPPHAVET (ONE OF THE NORTHERN APPROACHES TO TROMSO), ARRIVING IN TROMSO ON JULY 21. THE SHIPS DEPARTED TROMSO ON THE MORNING OF JULY 25 AND MANEUVERED IN THE FJORD AREAS SLIGHTLY NORTH AND WEST OF TROMSO AND HARSTAD BEFORE PROCEEDING SOUTH TO RAMSUND. ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION AT NO TIME DID STANAVFORLANT OPERATE NORTH OF 70-30 NORTH OR EAST OF 22 EAST--IN OTHER WORDS, IT STAYED FAR AWAY (PROBABLY AT LEAST 100 STATUTE MILES) FROM THE EASTERNMOST INCIDENT REPORTED INVOLVING A SOVIET VESSEL. THUS WHILE IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT THE MESSAGE THE SOVIETS INTEND TO CONVEY RELATES TO NATO ACTIVITIES IN THE AREA AND/OR TO WEST GERMAN PARTICIPATION IN SUCH ACTIVITIES, WE THINK THE EVIDENCE TO DATE IS THEN.

11. THE RELATIONSIP OF THE SOVIET INCIDENTS TO THUIR PRIOR REQUEST FOR TRANSIT IN THE INLAND WATERWAYS ON THE OTHER HAND MAYBE SOMEWHAT CLOSER, DESPITE WHAT CHRISTIANSEN SAID. WE UNDERSTAND FROM AMBASSADOR AMLIE, DIRECTOR OF THE LEGAL DIVISION AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, THAT THE SOVIET REQUEST
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FOR THESE REIVER BOATS WAS SOMEWHAT TRANSPARENT SINCE, ACCORD-
ING TO HIM, THE EXCUSE GIVEN WAS THE RIVER BOATS COULD NOT TRANSIT THE OPEN SEAS. HOWEVER, THE SOVIETS APPARENTLY ONLY INTEND TO USE THE INCLAND WATERWAYS IN THE FAR NORTHERN AREA NEAR THE NORTH CAPE (IN THE GENERAL VICINITY OF THE CURRENT SHIP INCIDENTS) MEANING THE RIVER BOATS WOULD BE ABLE TO TRANSIT OPEN SEAS IN THE SOUTH. AMLIE'S THEORY IS THAT THE SOVIETS ALL ALONG INTENDED TO CARRY OUT INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS OF SOME KIND IN THE INLAND WATERWAYS AND HAVING BEEN REFUSED PERMISSION BY THE GON, HAVE DECIDED TO GO AHEAD AND DO IT ANYWAY. WE NOTE THAT AT LEAST CERTAIN SECTORS OF THE NORWEGIAN PRESS ARE ALSO STRESSING THAT THE SOVIET INCIDENTS MAY BE RELATED TO EITHER THE EMPLACEMENT OF SOVIET INTELLIGENCE EQUIPMENT IN THE AREA OF THE MONITORING OF WESTERN EQUIPMENT. THESE PRESS STORIES HAVE STRESSED THAT SEVERAL OF THE SOVIET VESSELS INVOLVED HAVE BEEN SEEN HANDLING CABLES ON AND OFF THEIR BOATS INTO THE WATER.

12. IT IS ALSO OF COURSE POSSIBLE THE SOVIET INCIDENTS ARE DIRECTED AT THE BROADER POLITICAL OBJECTIVE SOFTENING UP THE GON FOR THE SERIES OF TALKS MINISTER EVENSEN IS TO HAVE IN MOSCOW NEXT MONTH. IN THIS EVENT, THE INCIDENTS COULD BE RELATED TO THE SOVIETS' HARDENING POSTION ON THE FPZ.

13. WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THE GON'S ATTITUDE OF OAVOIDING OVERDRAMATIZATION OF THE INCIDENTS IS THE CORRECT ONE FOR THE TIME BEING. THEY HAVE CERTAINLY NOT BE HELPED IN THIS OBJECTIVE BY THE OVERZEALOUS WORK OF THE BORED OSLO PRESS CORPS. IN AN OTHERWISE SLOW SUMMER SEASON, THE REPORTED INCIDENTS HAVE CLEARLY CONTRIBUTED TO SOMETHING OF A PUBLIC OVERREACTION. ON THE OTHER HAND THE GOVERNMENT HAS SHOWN THAT IT IS ACTING ON THE INCIDENTS BY INCREASING ITS MILITARY PATROL BOATS IN
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THE NORTH, BY ARRESTING ONE OF THE SOVIET VESSELS AND
BY RAISING THE ISSUE (AND THEN MAKING THAT FACT PUBLIC) WITH
THE RESIDENT SOVIET AMBASSADOR. SINCE THE GON HAS
AGREED TO CIRCULATE THE FACTS (AS THEY ARE CURRENTLY
KNOWN) TO THE ALLIANCE, WE BELIEVE OUR EFFORTS NOW

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SOULD BE TO ENCOURAGE THE GON TO KEEP THE
ALLIANCE BRIEFED AS MORE INFORMATION BECOMES
AVAILABLE AND TO HELP THE GON DE-EMOTIONALIZE THE SITUATION.
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